

A
L E T T E R

TO THE

Right Hon. WILLIAM PITT,

BY THE

Rev. CHRISTOPHER WYVILL,

*Late CHAIRMAN of the COMMITTEE of ASSOCIATION
of the COUNTY of YORK.*

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A LETTER, &c.

BURTON-HALL, Feb. 9, 1793.

SIR,

I have been induced, by the increasing attention of the Public to the subject of Parliamentary Reformation, to prepare for the press a Collection of Political Papers relating to that subject generally, but in a more particular manner respecting the attempt made some years ago, by the County of York and other considerable Districts, &c. to recover a more equal Representation, and more frequent Elections to serve the Public in Parliament. The Resolutions which were then passed by the Popular Assemblies on the very defective state of our Representation, contained principles on which a moderate, but substantial Reformation might have been effected; and when you generously undertook to offer to Parliament such a temperate Plan as the sense of the People, as far as it had been previously declared, seemed to point out, it had

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been very happy for the Public, and not less so for our Hereditary Rulers, if that Plan had not been rejected by the united opposition of their respective Partizans. By the Regulations alluded to, the great majority of those persons who had complained to Parliament of gross abuses in the Representation, would have been completely gratified, because the Regulations were, in fact, their own propositions improved by various modifications, which your superior judgment had suggested. Already your Regulations, if then adopted, would have operated nearly to the full extent proposed, and would have amputated, in the easiest manner, at the option of the persons concerned, many of the smallest, most venal, or most dependent Boroughs, and transferred, in an adequate degree, and in due proportion, their surrendered Franchises to the great Communities of the Kingdom, the Metropolis, the Counties, and the great Unrepresented Towns. This was a mild, a moderate, and yet an effectual System of Reformation; not sufficiently extensive, perhaps, in the proposed communication of the Right of Suffrage, but capable of receiving that extension hereafter, without the least derangement of the System then improved, by admitting decent Householders to vote for County Members; in the mean-time securing a very important improvement in the Representation of the People; and yet not only avoiding the hazard of a Revolution at that moment, but preventing almost the possibility of

of such a fearful event in every future period of time. With this conviction of the great utility of your Plan, and with every possible sentiment of grateful respect for your exertions to promote it, the popular agents desisted for some years to press the subject again on Parliament, or on the public mind. They desisted, well satisfied with your plan, and your conduct in the prosecution of it, and relying on your sincere and zealous attachment to their cause, they wished for no other advocate, they looked for no greater concessions, they aimed only to renew their suit by your means, and upon the very same terms when the fit moment should arrive.

But since that period, particularly during the last year, it is evident, that in several of these respects a material change of sentiment has taken place, and it is not improbable that some of those persons who triumphed on the rejection of your Plan in 1785, would now gladly see it adopted by Parliament, if at the same time the ancient attachment of the People to the Constitution of England could be universally restored. Various causes have combined to sour the minds of a considerable portion of the people, and to prepare them for bolder, more decisive, but more hazardous Schemes of Reformation. Some of the men alluded to, consider the former advocate of their cause with distrust, and abandon his temperate Plan, for the broad principle of Universal Suffrage adopted by the Duke of Richmond; while others avow their partiality for a

Republican Scheme of Government, admire the second Revolution of France, and would adopt the principles of it at every public and personal risque. To this Class not many of the middle station of life appear to belong; and very few who possess great consideration in the country, from their rank, fortune, or talents, seem to have placed themselves at their head. But it is evident there is a tendency to violent change, which, tho' manifested to no great extent at present, is yet a circumstance which deserves the most serious consideration. That this enthusiastic zeal for a total, or a very great and dangerous change in the Frame of our Legislature, may be checked by the rough hand of authority, straining every judicial and military power to suppress discussion and beat down the free Spirit of the People; this may be the wish of Mr. BURKE and his Disciples, but it cannot, I hope, be yours. Every man of humanity must wish to prevent discord and confusion by lenient means; every prudent lover of Liberty must wish to preserve the Constitution, not only from external violence and the wild schemes of Republican Innovators, but from the dangers of internal injury, from those more subtle and more formidable Enemies of the Constitution, who, availing themselves of the present national fervour of Loyalty, would brand with infamy every man who dares to point out abuses and express his wish for their correction, even on your temperate principles; without which it is plain, that at no distant period inveterate abuses

abuses will have become incorrigible, and the Constitution itself must be virtually annihilated.

There never has been a time, in my conception, when it more behoved the true Friends of the Constitution to advance, but with due temper and caution, in that middle course by which the dangerous extremes of the rash Leveller and the unprincipled Supporter of every abuse may best be avoided. Entertaining these sentiments, I deprecate a Foreign War as evidently tending on the one hand to increase the danger of Anarchy and a forcible Revolution, and on the other of Arbitrary Power and the loss of Popular Rights; and I wish to recommend to the Great a lenient and conciliatory disposition, to the People a firm purpose to vindicate their Rights in a temperate way, and with as little variation from your propositions as justice and the existing circumstances will permit.—For, that your propositions of Reform ought to be strictly adhered to, and would alone be completely satisfactory to the Public at this time, I cannot venture to assure you; but with two additions which accord with the principles of your system in the one case, and with those of justice in the other, I do believe they would be fully approved and permanently acquiesced in by the People. The additions, I allude to, are, that the Unrepresented Householders in England, contributing to Parochial Taxes, be allowed to vote in the County Elections; and that Elections in

in Scotland be placed as nearly as possible on a similar footing with those in England. It was one principal merit of your Plan, and the merit of it was entirely your own, that it provided against any great inconvenience from the Inequality which might arise afresh in the Representation, from the future growth of great Unrepresented Towns and the decay of those which are represented, by specifying the manner in which, when such instance of Inequality should occur, the Right of Representation should be transferred from the Depopulated Borough to the great Unrepresented Town. By this provision the necessity of any future Systematical Reform in the Frame of the House of Commons would have been precluded by your propositions. And at this moment, were those propositions adopted, with the additional improvements which I have here suggested, they would remove every material abuse in the Representation of the People, silence their just and general complaint, and at the same time place an insuperable barrier to defend the Constitution, and to stop the career of Republican Innovation. This, which may justly be deemed a great and peculiar advantage of your System of Reformation, has been undervalued, because it has been little understood by the superior classes. The fears of Aristocratical Men have been wrought up to an extravagant pitch by the wild eloquence of the Enemy of Popular Rights. He has taught them to believe that their only safety

safety consists in the constant persevering refusal to concede the smallest particle of the redress craved by the people ; that if a single concession be made, if a single decayed pin in the Frame of Parliament be removed, it would open the door to the utmost latitude of change, and the sacrifice of one abuse, or one usurped command of a Depopulated Borough, would lead, by certain and inevitable necessity, to all the Confusions and Horrors of a Neighbouring Kingdom. But were your Plan more plainly unfolded to their eyes, were it made manifest to them that it proposed to be, and undoubtedly would be a final arrangement of the Popular Representation, their fears, it may be hoped, would be dismissed. A Noble Duke might then, with satisfaction, apply to your System of Reform, the opinion which I believe he expressed of the extension of the Right of Suffrage proposed in Scotland by a respectable Baronet, whom I consider as one of the truest Patriots of that Country : “ This I approve, this is good as far as it goes ; and we see how far it is to go.”—Be that as it may, I hope the Publication in question may tend, in some degree, to remove the misconceptions and abate the prejudices of the powerful Few ; and at the same time to check the progress of Revolutionary Principles in the Many, by presenting a detailed account of the rise, progress, and termination of this popular enterprise ; a view of the difficulties encountered in

in the course of the struggle, most part of which remain to be encountered again, with a display of the advantages gained for the Public by regular and peaceful means, and a more full statement, than has yet been published, of the important improvements proposed by your System of Reform; which, though lost by the disunion of the People at one period, and their languor at another, may now be carried by the renewal of their united efforts, by exertions worthy of virtuous and benevolent men, by toils without hazard to private Individuals, without inconvenience to the Public; the fruits of which no Political Arithmetic could justly calculate, on an estimate of the probable calamities prevented by it, and the immense advantages procured to the Constitution, and to the Public, to this Age, and to Posterity. These are views which, I flatter myself, you do not, cannot disapprove; and under this impression, I beg leave to inform you, that I think the Publication of some of the Letters and other Papers which I have had the honour to receive from you, relating to the subject of Political Reformation, particularly a Paper intitled, *Heads of a Bill or Bills for amending the Representation*, would be of the greatest importance to promote the end proposed; and, if you have no objection to their appearance, I will insert them in this Collection. If you should dislike the appearance of these Papers at this time, they certainly shall be suppressed on the present occasion,

occasion. But to destroy them, or to engage my promise for their entire and perpetual suppression, is what I do not perceive to be necessary. They are Papers of great importance to the Public ; and, in certain conceivable circumstances, I should think myself bound, by the strongest obligation of Public Duty, to produce them, even although your consent could not possibly be obtained.

And now, Sir, having stated fully my immediate inducement for troubling you with this Letter, I should naturally think it proper, in other and happier times, to close my letter here. But when I consider the more than critical situation of the Country, when I recollect the confidential intercourse which has passed between us, and reflect that I am indebted for the honour of those communications to the previous trust reposed in me, by a very considerable Body of Gentlemen, who knew my principles and approved my conduct, and who themselves possessed a large share of national esteem and confidence for their truly patriotic exertions ; I feel it to be a duty to you, and to myself, to them, and to the Public, not to conceal from you my sentiments on some late Transactions and my reasons for earnestly deprecating the impending rupture with France, on any of those grounds which have been stated, or those undeclared views which may be conceived to operate on the mind of Parliament and of the Cabinet. And though I cannot flatter myself that the opinions of a private

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Individual can have much weight in your mind at a moment like this, when the resolution for Hostilities seems to be fixed, and the terrible Machine of War is just ready to roll on ; yet, considering I can with truth assure you that they are the decided opinions also of many of your best and most disinterested Friends, I cannot suppose that this frank, but not unfriendly, representation will be wholly useless to the Public, and unavailing either to incline you to preserve the Pacific System to which we owe the present boasted prosperity of the Country ; or, if that be now hopeless, to incline you, as soon as possible, to return to it ; and I heartily wish it may be of any avail to recommend lenient measures also in our Internal Affairs ; without which, particularly without some concession in favour of Popular Rights, I fear it will not be possible for any human prudence long to prevent some very calamitous eruption.

I now proceed to represent to you my reasons for disapproving one part of your conduct as a Member of Parliament, individually ; and several parts of it as a Minister, connected with the other Members of the Cabinet ; especially regarding the present unhappy dispute with France : but not without this previous assurance, that I perform this task with pain and reluctance, and for many, many instances of your former conduct, I have a thousand times sincerely applauded you, and still think you deserved applause.

The instance of your individual conduct as a Member

Member of Parliament, to which I alluded above, is your Declaration of Hostility to Mr. Grey's future Motion, when he gave notice in the last Session of his intention to agitate afresh the subject of Parliamentary Reformation. I own, Sir, this was to me a most mortifying disappointment. I had before understood, that whenever the People manifested any stronger and more earnest desire than was displayed in 1785, that a Reform of Parliament should take place, you would gladly stand forward again to promote it; and, connected with this resolution, I approved your forbearing to renew your Motion, and, in fact, to degrade the Public Cause, by exposing it, unsupported by the Public Voice, to certain and repeated defeat. For this reason, when Mr. Flood proposed his Motion on the same subject in 1790, and you declined to support it, your conduct appeared to me justifiable. Mr. Flood proposed, at that time, to extend the Right of Suffrage to certain Classes of Householders; this seems a measure perfectly proper, though his idea of giving these Householders a separate Body of Representatives, is liable, I think, to insuperable objections; but though he supported his propositions with great force of argument and manly eloquence, yet, when you objected the indisposition of the People to the Measure, and its consequent unseasonableness at that time, the truth of your observation could not be denied, nor could you be justly blamed for not concurring in that proposal. But, in the short space

of two years, the disposition and sentiments of the Public had undergone a material change. A strong tendency to Reform was visible in many parts of the Kingdom, when Mr. Grey gave notice of his intended Motion: Had you remained silent, you would have been blameless; had you declared your adherence to your former ideas of Political Reformation, and your readiness to promote that necessary work, whenever the sense of the Nation was sufficiently declared in its favour, you would have acted, I think, consistently with your professed opinions and your former conduct, you would have given a friendly countenance to this laudable enterprise, you would have preserved your credit and influence with the whole Body of Reformers, and would have had it in your power to model the intended propositions, in a great measure, according to your judgment, and to have effected, what every prudent Friend to the Constitution wishes to see, a temperate correction of its abuses, beneficial for the advantages which would immediately result from it, and doubly valuable for the mischiefs it would be certain to prevent.

In vindication of your announced opposition, it may be pleaded, that *the Time* was unfit; that is, in the year 1790, it was improper to attempt a Reformation of Parliament, because the People were indifferent to it; and in the year 1792, or 1793, it is improper, because they are become too earnest to obtain it. From this simple statement,

statement, how unbecoming your character must this excuse appear, should any of your imprudent Partizans unwarily advance it? How futile, how ludicrously absurd must it appear when considered in connection with the conduct of Government in Ireland, where it is understood that concessions, as ample as any contended for here, have been, or will be, made at the express recommendation of Government, and *at a time* when it is notorious, that the claims of the People of Ireland have neither been less extensive, nor their conduct more regular, than the conduct and claims of the People of Great Britain. In my judgment, the intended concessions there are prudent and proper; it is never an unfit time to do National Justice, nor unwise to content great portions of the People: But abuses exist here as in Ireland; and the maxims of Political Justice are as binding on this side of the channel as on that: Why, therefore, is the time objected to here? When considerable portions of the English or of any People complain of abuses which cannot be denied, the earliest period is the best and safest to put an end to their existence.

But the fair truth may be that, on the occasion alluded to, you were taken by surprise, and having been long in habits of controversy with the Honourable Member, you somewhat inconsiderately treated the great National Question, of which he had given notice, as a mere Opposition Question. If that had been the case, and if your Opponent had brought forward his Motion,

Motion, merely with the unworthy view to embarrass a Minister whom he dislikes, nothing could be a greater triumph to him, than this apparent inconsistency of your conduct.

But I see no reason to doubt, that your opponent acted from the same generous motives as yourself, when you repeatedly declared to Parliament that without some Reformation there, the Rights and Liberty of the Nation could not be safe: And he and every rational Friend to the Constitution would undoubtedly rejoice to find, that on mature consideration you had resolved to alter your conduct and support his Motion. To form and execute this purpose would be an act of resolute virtue, which I acknowledge ought to be expected from few persons living; but you have before displayed the magnanimity publicly to confess an error; and in the opinion of the wisest men, the confession did you more credit than being many times in the right. On the present question similar conduct would do your character additional honour; it would be a signal instance of your superiority to the little passions of little minds; it would be a proof of patriotism for which you would have the most unquestionable title to the gratitude of the Public.

It is natural to wish that a noble character should be complete, and in every point invulnerable. But on considering the measures of the Cabinet for the last ten months, the Friends of Reformation will perceive little reason

son to flatter themselves, that your deliberate thoughts have inclined you to make this sacrifice to the consistency of your character. In those measures and their immediate consequences they will discover no indications of a lenient and accommodating spirit, no tendency to any popular concession, or any redress of grievances in Britain. On the contrary those measures present a uniform system of authority, harshly and severely exercised ; of Proclamations branding with one common mark of infamy, the Leveller and the rash Republican, and the most orderly and rational Reformers, the truest Patriots, and the best Friends of the Constitution ; of numerous Prosecutions tending alike to punish Sedition and to suppress the Freedom of discussion ; of Barracks erected in almost every considerable Place, calculated equally to intimidate riotous men, and to over-awe and quell the spirit of Parliamentary Reformation, however pacific however regular it may have been : And the Associations which have been the immediate consequence of some of these measures, and which have assumed to themselves the accusatorial power vested by the Constitution in the Attorney-General or the Grand Juries of the Kingdom, if suffered to proceed in their career, neither discomfited by Government nor opposed by the sense and spirit of the Public, what would they leave us that is either sweetly confidential in Private Society, or open, bold, and generous in the exertions of

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Public-spirited Men? It was proposed, I believe by Mr. Burke to Mr. Fox, about the beginning of these disputes that he would join with him, *to frown down the doctrines of Liberty.* On considering the tendency of these measures a candid man might be tempted to suppose that the proposal, to which Mr. Fox gave a generous refusal, had been accepted by the Cabinet. But whatever was the intention of the Cabinet, the tendency of their internal measures has been exactly suitable to the wish of Mr. Burke, and his political Disciple, who could prefer the flavish rants and the flattery of his Master, to the friendship and manly freedom of Mr. Fox. But though I reprobate the tendency of some of these measures, and the dangerous abuses which already have been produced by others, yet I am ready to admit that the times are truly embarrassing to Ministers, that on the one hand the Great are unwilling to concede, while on the other hand a spirit of discontent has begun to ferment in the great body of the Nation; and therefore that faults great as these may be excused in Ministers sincerely labouring to preserve Public tranquillity. For the good performed they deserve credit; for the evils, which may be the accidental concomitants, they may, within certain bounds, deserve forgiveness. But if this is a valid plea for that succession of harsh measures which we have witnessed within the last ten months, how strange

strange is the infatuation which, at the same time, can plunge this dissatisfied country into a war with France, as if the rapid fall of the Funds, the loss of our Foreign Trade, the diminution of our Manufactures, and the increase of Taxes, which must be the consequence of a War, would have no tendency to aggravate popular discontent and increase the fermentation in the public mind, even if the interest of the Nation were evidently the object of the War. How greatly must that danger be increased, when it is understood that a War, of such extent as that with France must be, is resolved on, not for the preservation, immediate or remote, of this Country or any of its valuable interests, not to avenge insult, to preserve the faith of Treaties, or to repel the aggression of a declared Foe, but for some other purpose which is not declared, but which every art of eloquence is in vain employed to cover.

It is said, by the Person to whom this Nation may justly impute a great part of the perils with which it is at present surrounded, that the French are a Nation of Atheists. The Creed of Rome is still, however, the Creed of their Established Church, and of the Body of the Nation. But grant that the assertion were literally true, instead of being a most extravagant exaggeration, is Infidelity, or is Idolatry a justifiable cause of War? Must our Minister at the Court of Constantinople be withdrawn, because the Turk-

ish Nation despises Christianity? Or must our pompous, and perhaps useful, Embassy to China be recalled, because the inferior Chinese are Pagans, and their literary Mandarins are Atheistic Philosophers? Must the plains of all Europe be deluged with human blood for a Creed? And must we become the enemies of by far the greatest part of mankind for such a reason as this? Even the Enthusiasm of Mr. Burke's Disciples would revolt at such absurdity.—But the French Republic has been founded on principles of Anarchy and Confusion; tumult and massacre have disgraced its origin; and, after many intermediate enormities, the murder of the King has finished the horrors of this last Revolution, and will stain the annals of France with ignominy to the latest posterity. With grief I acknowledge, that a more unjust, a more atrocious deed than the murder of Louis the XVIth. is not to be found in History. I most sincerely deplore that act of vengeance as a measure equally unnecessary, impolitic, and unjust, tending to retard the peaceful settlement of France, and to disgrace the cause of Human Liberty in the eyes of mankind; and affecting the interest of this Country with peculiar fatality; which, if that event had not occurred, would not have been exposed to the calamities of War. But what right has England to punish the authors of this atrocity, or indeed to interfere in any manner in the internal affairs of that Country? The domestic

domestic crimes committed by Individuals, or by the Ruling Power of any Nation, have never yet been held to be a just cause of War. Crimes of uncommon magnitude indeed have been committed in France; but whether the actors of those crimes should be punished—by whom—and how—these are questions on which not the Austrian, not the Prussian, or English Court, but the People of France alone, must determine. When a great Princefs imprisoned her Husband, and mounted his vacant Throne, perhaps that Revolution was completed by means as dark and horrible as the late atrocious act which every good man must lament. And yet no war of punishment ensued; vengeance was left to Him to whom vengeance belongs. But the folly is too apparent for any farther elucidation of going to War to punish the innocent Many for the crimes of the guilty Few, and thus wantonly to add to those miseries of the unfortunate human race, the enormous sum of which we affect to deplore.

But the principles of Liberty and Equality lead directly to Anarchy and Ruin; they are contagious principles, and the introduction of them in this Country can be prevented by War alone. It were more just to assert, that all great Revolutions in Government, on whatever principle they may be conducted, are usually productive of temporary confusion and many enormities; and, in proportion to the extent and importance of

the changes effected, will be the duration and extent of these consequent evils. But, since the obnoxious principles have been predominant in America near twenty years, and have there produced the most happy tranquillity and good order, it is evident that they are not principles necessarily destructive of the end for which Society was formed.—The love of Liberty is an inherent passion of the human mind; neither art, nor force, nor any human authority, can wholly eradicate this passion: Hence the contagious effect of the French doctrines upon the enslaved Peasants of Germany and Poland, of Spain and Italy. Nature meant them to be free; they are conscious it is their right, and every fibre of every heart beats high with the expectation of deliverance. That these expectations must be realized to a certain degree in all the great Monarchies of the Continent, seems highly probable; a little sooner in some countries, a little later in others; with more or less violent convulsions in all, as various unforeseen circumstances, combined with the prudence or the insanity of their respective Governments, may determine. England alone perhaps is that European Country in which it is possible that the wisdom of Government might happily prevent any great concussion; because the People of England have not to seek for Freedom in a new Constitution; freedom and equal protection of property and personal safety, are the Rights which, in speculation, are held out to all by our present

present Constitution. To bring theory and practice more together, to correct abuses of recent introduction, and to restore our Parliament to the purity of its original institution, are benefits which our wisest Patriots have laboured to attain ; which our greatest Statesmen have thought attainable by peaceful means; and with which the English People undoubtedly would be content. They are industrious, they are peaceful, they wish to enjoy the fruits of their industry without a War, and to recover their lost weight in our mixed Frame of Government, without the hazards of a Revolution. By persevering in the system of a neutrality with France, and adopting the spirit of your moderate propositions of Reform, the Cabinet might preserve their Countrymen from the dreaded infection of France ; but opposite measures will probably produce a contrary effect. It is from the prevalence of Mr. Burke's Politics alone among the upper classes of Society, that the rise of any dangerous disaffection in this Country is to be apprehended. To the plain sense of Englishmen, a War commenced with France, on his principles, must appear to be a War on French Liberty, to beat down the equitable claims of Reformation here, and eventually to destroy every valuable Right of the People. Such will be the suspected motives for plunging this Country in a War in which our fleets may be victorious, but in which even our successes must be ruinous.—For views thus wild and chimerical,

chimerical, the Nation, whose wounds received in the late War with America are hardly yet closed up, must prepare to bleed afresh: For objects thus odious and detestable, the industrious classes of the People must forego their comforts, the shoulders already galled with Taxes, the pernicious consequence of former injustice and folly, must submit again to new and heavier impositions. They will be chearfully voted, no doubt, by the faithful Commons, but the Commons will no longer enjoy the confidence of the Public; every vote of credit or supply will then increase the general disgust; and should no great disaster befall us in the course of Hostilities, should nothing unfortunate break forth in Ireland or America, the mere protraction of the War must exhaust the patience of a disabused People. But what may be the contagious effect of French opinions on a Nation sick of the War of Kings, groaning under an intolerable load of Taxes, and hopeless of redrefs from Men whom they will cease to consider as their Representatives, it is needless to state; to foresee it is easy, to prevent it may become impossible.

But these, I am persuaded, are not the motives which preponderate in your mind upon this momentous occasion, and impel it, with so much impetuosity, to a War with France. Undoubtedly you are influenced by other reasons less unbecoming a Statesman, less unworthy the Son of Chatham.

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The obnoxious Decree by the National Convention of France, on the 19th of November, 1792, has been insisted on as a warrantable cause of War. But, as a subsequent explanation of that justly obnoxious Decree has removed all ground of apprehension that it is the intention of France to excite Rebellion against the actual Government of any neutral Nation, the Decree in question may be dismissed without any further consideration.

The obligation to resist the opening of the Scheldt has been insisted on with still more force. We are bound by Treaty to the Dutch to prevent the free Navigation of that river. The Convention of France have declared their resolution that the Navigation of it shall be free. But the Dutch, you fairly acknowledge, have not made any requisition to Britain to fulfil that engagement. Reasons of prudential Policy, arising probably from the distracted state of Parties in Holland, as well as from the great Military force of France now posted on their Frontiers, and ready to invade their defenceless Territory on the first breach of their Neutrality, may well incline them to peace, and to waive our interference to oppose the opening of the Scheldt.

National justice surely does not require that we should urge the Cabinet at the Hague, against the inclination, and, perhaps, against the interest of the Dutch People, to engage in a War with France. Of the interests and of the dangers of their

their Country they are the best and the only proper judges. At this moment, our interposition to excite them to Hostilities, instead of being the prudent and faithful discharge of our duty, as their Ally, seems to be an officious and unseasonable interference, which may expose them to the greatest dangers. By persevering in their Neutrality, the United Provinces might remain safe and unmolested amidst surrounding Armies. But should they abandon their pacific system, at the instigation of Britain, it is not improbable, that an immediate irruption by the Army of France may produce in those Provinces the most fatal consequences; a dissolution of their ancient Government, and a New Constitution on the hated principles of France. But in the event of a War these impending perils may be averted by timely succour from the Prussian Army, and the officious friendship of Britain may not prove the ruin of her Ally. This will be a truly fortunate escape for Holland; yet the dangerous Policy of our Cabinet cannot be popular in that Country; and in this, more specious reasons will be necessary to justify to their Countrymen their eagerness for War, than the obligation of a Treaty, for the fulfillment of which no requisition has been made.

More specious reasons for a rupture with France are, however, sufficiently obvious.—1st, It has been said that we ought to engage in a War to prevent the aggrandisement of France.—

France.—2d, It has been thought, probably, that we ought to seize this fortunate opportunity to aggrandize Britain.

The first of these considerations has been much insisted on by yourself in your speech in Parliament on the 1st of February, and it must be owned that it bears the semblance of sound policy ; but, on examination, the apprehension of danger to the independence of Europe from the arms of France, will be found, I conceive, to be unsupported by any solid grounds, either of fact or of political speculation. The second of these considerations has not been expressly stated in any speech in Parliament which has fallen under my inspection ; but as it appears probable that it may have had a considerable influence on the Cabinet, and still more on that part of the Parliament and the Nation which is inclined to War, it may merit a distinct examination.

On the first topic, I am willing to concede, that a lust of power, which is often the ruling passion of great despotic Princes, may be found sometimes predominant in Popular Senates; and more particularly, that the designs of the National Convention are probably as unjust and ambitious as the views of Louis the XIVth, and in this respect more culpable, that a thirst of conquest is contradictory to their professed principles of peace and moderation; and though the Government of France is in an unsettled state,

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though much of her wealth has been hoarded or exported, and many of her Citizens have been lost to that Country by massacre, banishment, and emigration ; yet, notwithstanding these disadvantages, there still seems to remain, to the National Convention, a greater degree of Political Power than was possessed by that Monarch ; a greater population, a more extensive fund of credit, and a more ardent Military Spirit, pervading the whole body of the Nation. But the Princes already opposed to the National Convention, appear sufficiently able to check and defeat their hasty projects of aggrandisement.—Since the age of Louis the XIVth, the power of the Austrian Monarchy has been increased in a much greater proportion than that of France. The discontents in Hungary, which so greatly weakened the Emperors, who were the antagonists of Louis, have, by the wisdom and ability of the succeeding Austrian Monarchs, been happily composed ; and the whole force of that Monarchy may now be turned against France, to which it is in population almost equal, in the number of its disciplined troops lately much superior, with Revenues not very inferior to those of the Republic. To this formidable force, let that of the Prussian Monarchy be added ; which, from insignificance in the age of Louis the XIVth, has risen to a rank nearly equal in Military Power to that of the greatest Empires of Europe. When to the force of these two

two Monarchies is added that of the Germanic Empire, Sardinia, and Russia, whose power, tho' now so preponderant, was, in the last Century, little felt or respected in Europe ; the mighty strength of this confederacy must appear, according to the ordinary rules of Political Estimation, much superior to that of France ; and likely soon to wrest from her, the conquests she has made, without the aid of Britain and her Ally.

But what avail the superior numbers and discipline of the Allied Armies against the ardour and enthusiasm of the Freemen of France ? Or what credit is due to the common calculations of Political Arithmetic, when contradicted by facts and the actual conquests of the French Armies ? To this difficulty, I think, a satisfactory solution may be given.

It is true, in August last the Armies of Austria and Prussia, then preparing to attack France, and restore the old despotic Government by force, in the opinions of the most experienced Military Officers, were greatly superior to any means of resistance which the French Nation could oppose to them ; yet such was the uncalculated power of their enthusiasm to defend their Republican Liberty and the insulted Independence of their Country, so completely did the ardour of Freedom supply the want of discipline in the Volunteer Armies of France, that, in a few weeks, the German Invaders were obliged to retreat before them with disgrace.

Soon after that unexpected success, the French Armies, after a short struggle in the Netherlands, took possession of that Country and of some Frontier Districts of Germany, which, in the proud presumption of certain conquest, the Enemies of France had left unprepared for defence. A short time before this period, Savoy and Nice also had been conquered with as little risque or trouble. But can it be supposed, that the Volunteer Armies of France will act with equal enthusiasm to preserve the Countries they have thus hastily over-run? or that the extension of the Frontiers of France is an object as deeply interesting to the French People, as the defence of their National Rights and Liberty? These suppositions are contrary to all experience of human nature; and they are contradicted by the actual state of the French Armies.

It is observable, in the human species, that self-preservation is a stronger and more uniformly prevailing principle of action than any other, though it may sometimes be over-ruled by resentment, or some other of the malevolent and destructive passions. But when this observation is extended from Individuals to whole Communities of Men, it is liable to no such exceptions. Nations will always be found to make greater efforts to defend themselves, than to conquer or destroy their antagonists. And with this maxim, the actual state of the Armies of France seems to correspond. The Volunteers

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who flocked to the standard of Dumourier, when Champagne was invaded, after having repulsed the enemy beyond the boundaries of France, no longer thought their service necessary ; they quitted the Army, and returned to the bosom of their families. Of this secession the Generals have frequently complained to the National Convention ; but the means of prevention were not to be found. Attacked at home, it may be safely predicted that France will be found unconquerable ; her National Guards will defend her again with equal enthusiasm, and with final, if not equal success. But that her Armies will be able to retain the countries of which they have lately taken possession, against the force of the Austrian and Prussian Monarchs, and the Powers combined with them, is an apprehension not countenanced by any apparent probability. It is evident, at least, that Britain and Holland might safely defer their accession to the Confederacy till the events of another campaign had more clearly demonstrated the relative force of the present combatants, and confirmed, or wholly removed, the apprehension of danger from France. It would then appear manifest, either that our interposition to prevent any great increase of the power of France, was unnecessary, and thus a great national calamity would be prevented ; or, if there were an evident necessity for War, to prevent a dangerous aggrandisement of the French Republic,

public, that necessity would reconcile this Nation to the unavoidable pressure of new Taxes ; and thus the danger of internal commotion would be avoided.

2d. But it may be thought, if the Nations at present engaged in War with France are more than equal in power to that country, and likely to recover the conquered provinces almost as quickly as they were lost, that supposition confirms the policy of an immediate commencement of hostilities, on the part of Britain, with a view to aggrandise this country at the expence of France. How unjust is this reason for War ? How unfit, therefore, either to be adopted or avowed. And yet, in the present situation of this country, it is not more unjust and unbecoming, than it is impolitic and unsafe. There is another, a more safe and honourable way to aggrandise Britain, by adhering to a Pacific System, by forbearing to harass the Commercial and Manufacturing industry of the Country with needless Wars and needless Armaments, by persevering in a plan of Public Oeconomy, and diminishing the Debts and Taxes of the Nation, those especially which bear hard on the Poorest Classes of the Community. This is the true policy of a State like that of Britain, encumbered with debts, and perplexed by the discontents of its subjects. These are the conquests of peace ; these are cheap and inoffensive ways of aggrandisement, which would equally augment the

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Political Power of our country and increase the means of comfort and satisfaction to every individual in it. But, after having successfully pursued this policy for some years, and gradually restored their almost ruined country to prosperity and splendour, the Cabinet seem to have abandoned this Pacific System as if weary of the tame uniformity of Peace, and at last regardless of that applause with which their generous neutrality to France had been rewarded. Widely different from their first peaceful system was the policy of the late War against the Sultan of Mysoore; at the opening of it, France was too much disabled, by the convulsions consequent on the first Revolution, to assist her East-Indian Ally; the opportunity was too tempting to be passed, and though some recent Declarations of Parliament, protesting against any farther encroachments in India, seemed not quite reconcilable to these ambitious views, the War was approved by Parliament, and great part of the territories of Tippoo Sultan were soon afterwards divided among the Confederate Powers of Britain, the Nizam, and the Mahrattas. And now another opportunity, no less tempting, presents itself in the West. The French Sugar Islands are in a state of great discontent, if not of Counter-Revolution; to take possession of these Islands, and of the other Colonies of France, perhaps, with the previous approbation of the Inhabitants, would be an easy enterprise for the Fleets of Britain

Britain. And what good Citizen would repine to pay additional Taxes, for a few years, to support a War of Glory and National Aggrandisement? By these splendid objects a part of the Nation may, for a time, be dazzled; it may be deaf to every remonstrance of prudence, and insensible to every impression of justice; and while this moral stupefaction lasts the success of projects which no one dares to avow, and yet, which no one doubts are formed, will be applauded by that part of the Nation. At last, the strong pressure of distress will make itself felt; for it will not be a short War, nor will few Taxes be wanted; the French are combating for all that can be dear to man, for the Liberty Civil and Religious which they have chosen to establish, for the independence, the existence of their Country. In proportion to the value of these objects, their resistance will be vigorous and persevering; their divisions will be in a great measure healed up by the necessity of self-defence, against their common foes, their hatred of Monarchy will be confirmed, and their animosity against the unhappy Family, whose interest has been the ostensible cause of the War, will become less furious, perhaps, but more inveterate and implacable. Their expenditure will, indeed, be enormous; their naval equipments will add considerably to the immense expences of one of the largest Armies in Europe. Already their trade is nearly ruined, and their taxes now

now very deficient, must become more unproductive during the War. But still their resources to support it are great indeed, and equal to the longest struggle, for they are adequate to the extent of those confiscations, the severity of which we so justly condemn. In the course of this struggle, therefore, it is probable, that the means and the patience of the English people will be first exhausted ; and then awaking from their dreams of glory and vengeance, they will see the precipice of National Bankruptcy just before them ; and whether, at that moment, the acquisition of three or four Sugar Islands will appear a sufficient compensation for the miseries felt and apprehended, is a question to which the true answser is sufficiently obvious. Men enriched by the official emoluments of a War, men thriving under the patronage of the Crown, increased by the New Establishments, civil and military, in the conquered Islands, will think it a fortunate War for them ; but the great body of the nation will feel itself impoverished and undone by its victories ; their property they will perceive has been devoured by that very measure which will have fed the now dangerous influence of the Crown to a truly formidable size. The alarm for the Liberty of Britain will again become universal, as it was some years before the close of the Civil War with America ; and that alarm, combined with the causes of discontent already existing in the country, may too probably produce a degree of popular effervescence

much surpassing what was then experienced. I intreat you, Sir, once more to attend to these perilous circumstances, to consider the actual situation of Ireland, the unsatisfied claims of America, her attachment to France, and the probability, the certainty, I had almost said, that if the danger of her Ally should become extreme by the junction of Britain and Holland, with the great Continental Powers combined against her, she will repay her debt of gratitude to France by defending the Liberty of that country to which she owes her own: And, after having taken a comprehensive survey of all these alarming circumstances, then say, if you can, that the prospect does not appall you.

I have now, Sir, communicated my reasons for disapproving the intended War with France, and also some other parts of your conduct as a Member of the Cabinet, and an Individual Member of Parliament. For the freedom of this Address, you will think no apology necessary; you will readily ascribe it to its true cause. My motives, I am confident, you cannot but approve, however my arguments may fail to make the desired impression on your mind. I conclude this letter, I must own, with much fainter hopes than I began it, that a rupture with France may yet be prevented. The Ministers of that country had made repeated overtures of conciliation to the Cabinet of London; they were evidently unwilling to enter into Hostilities against the British nation. And you, Sir, in your speech
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in Parliament on the 1st of February, appeared willing, to the last moment, to listen to terms of accommodation. From these circumstances, the hope was still cherished, not only that a War between Britain and France might be averted, but that, by your wise and humane intercession, the general tranquillity of Europe also might be restored.

But the events of a few days have almost totally destroyed the possibility of an accommodation. The embargo laid upon British vessels in the ports of France, the unfortunate consequence of the dismission of M. Chauvelin ; and, upon that intelligence, the more unfortunate order to M. Maret to depart the kingdom, * without having been permitted to state the fresh overtures of pacification, the fresh proofs of their respect for this country, and their desire to continue in amity with it, with which he was charged by the Executive Government of France, seem hardly to leave the shadow of a hope, that Peace can be preserved. If a War be commenced, it is my earnest prayer, that Providence may be pleased to shorten the calamities which await this devoted country.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your most obedient and most humble servant,
C. W Y V I L L.

To the Right Hon. }
WILLIAM Pitt. }

* So this transaction is understood at present.—I should be extremely glad to find it is a mistake.